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ABSTRACT

The Middle Eastern ethnic community of Jacksonville, Florida, derives from three phases of immigration. During Phase I, 1890-1920, the first pioneers made an initial adaptation and began the formation of an ethnic community. During Phase II, 1920-1950, the group grew because of the arrival of a small number of new immigrants as well as through natural increase. These two phases were characterized by great emphasis on acculturation and assimiliation in all aspects of life, including patriotism and civic duty, though pluralism was also expressed through ethnic organizations. After 1950, following the establishment of the state of Israel, a new wave of immigrants from the town of Ramallah came into Jacksonville. These people have been more separatist in outlook than the earlier immigrants. They express greater commitment to the Arab cause in the Middle East through membership in organizations and through financial contributions. In terms of expressed sympathy for the Arab cause, however, the immigrants of Phases I and II and their descendants are just as supportive as the more recent immigrants of Phase III. (Author/BE)

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POLITICAL ATTITUDES, PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM:

A White Ethnic Case Study

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Political Attitudes, Participation and Activism:

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Introduction

Since the last decade of the nineteenth century Jacksonville, Florida has been the destination of immigrants from various countries of the Middle East who came, stayed, produced families, developed ethnic institutions and community structures simultaneously with undergoing the processes of acculturation and assimilation. Though the numbers of newcomers have varied from decade to decade reflecting immigration laws and patterns in general, the influx has nonetheless been continuous.

The first section of this paper will provide a brief historical account of the three major phases of the immigration, concentrating on the differing sources of origin, demographic variations and clearly differentiated modes of adaptation. Data for this segment is derived from a number of sources, including Census data, two unpublished autobiographies by immigrants to Jacksonville, a published account of the history of the group (David), participant observation by the author and nineteen taped interviews with migrants recorded in 1977.

The second section will deal with general theory related to the processes of acculturation and assimilation on the one hand and cultural pluralism on the other, concentrating on the tensions that develop within an ethnic community when the pressures related to these two social forces conflict.

Of special interest in this respect is that aspect of the assimilation process related to the degree of identification an immigrant group feels for the adoptive nation on the one hand and their native land on the other. Related to this is the aspect of assimilation reflected in political behavior, attitudes and activism.

The final section of the paper will be an analysis of data related to identificational and civic assimilation gathered through the questionnaire technique from eighty-eight members of the Middle Eastern community of Jacksonville during the summer of 1977. This data is a segment of a comprehensive ongoing study of the group. Since the group of eighty-eight respondents is neither sufficiently large nor a random sample of the whole, nonparametric statistics have been used. Analysed in this manner, the data represent valid political attitude and behavior information on a number of individuals sufficient to lend credibility to some intuitive conclusions.

Historical Sketch

Though no one knows when the first Middle Eastern immigrant came to Jacksonville, an educated guess is 1890. The first phase can thus be identified as 1890-1920. The first decade was marked by a slow but steady trickle of arrivals. By 1900 there were representatives of several different families and towns of origin beginning a new life in this commercial port city. They were primarily Christian young men, some being brothers, from Syria, which was to be divided into Syria and Lebanon in 1926. There were, however, a few adult women who came at this time, establishing peddling or store enterprises.

The educational attainment of the original group reflected considerable variance. A few had gone to Protestant missionary schools; one female reported training in a French convent in Beirut. Most towns in the old country had limited or nonexistent public or parochial schooling; hence, many had had little

opportunity to learn English or other skills to assist in adjustment to the new milieu.

How the earliest migrants came to choose Jacksonville is not clearly expressed anywhere. This port city had a strategic location for commercial development, having enjoyed a degree of dominance as a center of trade and control of the shipping lanes. During the decade of the 1880's, however, a devastating yellow fever epidemic had decimated the population. There seems, subsequent to this, to have been a concerted effort on the part of civic leaders to attract aggressive migrants to the city to help develop its potential. The fact that this urban setting was a commercial rather than a manufacturing locus enhanced its appeal for the Middle Eastern young men whose preference for self-employment over blue collar work in a factory setting has been noted (Berger). Since Jacksonville was surrounded by a productive agricultural area, its importance as a food wholesale and retail center and distribution point was clearly recognized.

These pioneers came with little besides energy, thrift and industry. They made the oceanic crossing in steerage accomodations, finally reaching their destination either to set up a peddling enterprise or to open a small store in the downtown district. The economic setting and the place of residence were usually one and the same, the front section being used for business with the curtained off rear for living quarters. After the first few years, younger relatives would join established family members and through mutual aid they would enlarge the economic horizons. In time, visits back to the old country to bring back a wife could be accomplished and a new generation began to appear. Thus, by the first decade of the twentieth century the first slow trickle became a rushing stream, with wives and children as well as young adult brothers, sisters and cousins joining the original nucleus. By 1920 there were between four and five hundred Middle Easterners in and around Jacksonville.

During the first phase a sense of community began to express itself in the development of ethnic organizations. A women's organization founded in 1910 and a men's club established in 1912 continue in altered form up to the present. These represent a pluralistic aspect of the adaptation process, through which group sentiments, interests and social patterns could be expressed. They served as a vehicle for group identity as well as easing the strains of minority status.

The early migrants as a group lost little time in applying for and acquiring American citizenship, attesting to the intention to leave the old country permanently, to become a part of the new. Perhaps the fact that Syrians felt the Turks who ruled were alien and exploitative governors explains the lack of ambivalence toward the shift of political loyalties. In fact, during the First World War a number of young men joined the armed forces, served, and received American citizenship when they were honorably discharged. Loyalty to family and religion was strong; nationalistic loyalties to the old country were low or non-existent.

It is useful to date the second phase of the immigration from the decade of the 1920's because this is the period during which restrictive immigration legislation was enacted. Still, a significant group of young men and women were added to the community at this time. Many males returned and brought back wives. Younger brothers, nephews and cousins continued to join established households. In addition, the American-born second generation was greatly expanding the size of the community. Family patterns reflected high fertility and strong family bonds.

This group found a ready-made community. Many moved into comfortable homes of close relatives who assumed responsibility for their well-being, employing them in already-flourishing enterprises. Through frugality they saved

enough to search out an interstitial economic niche to launch themselves as independent entrepreneurs. A few tried the Detroit industrial promised land only to return, drawn by family bonds, warmer climate and the lure of self-employment.

During this second phase the Middle Eastern community came into its own as a subculture, providing new members with many ready-made answers to the problems of social life, along with a clear set of obligations and normative requirements. Relatives were sources of financial assistance in the form of loans and jobs. Ethnic members who were not related sometimes pooled their resources in a profitable business venture. Business enterprises had been begun and many were thriving, providing insights and patterns for newcomers to emulate. Older generation members who had joined churches, civic organizations or business groups served as sponsors for their younger kinsmen, thus facilitating more rapid acculturation and assimilation.

Many of the American born second generation were completing high school during the bleak years of the 1930's. For those who attended school in this country the acculturation process had a different character than for those who migrated as young adults. Some of the second generation rejected the Arabic language, the adult subculture and the organizational mechanisms related to ethnicity. These probably experienced a sense of marginality. Some, however, built on the ethnic bonds and a variety of new local ethnic organizations came into being, some of them geared to the interests of young people.

During the early 1930's a national federation of Syrian-Lebanese American Clubs, with regional subdivisions, was founded, providing a mechanism for expanding the ethnic boundaries to form broader identificational arrangements.

During the Second World War the number of Middle Easterners, including those born in this country, was about 2,500 for Jacksonville. Over 225 of

of these served in the war, six losing their lives, providing further evidence of the continuing identificational assimilation.

It is likely that Middle Eastern immigration to Jacksonville would have virtually ended with Phase II had events in the Middle East not included the establishment of the state of Israel with the resultant motivation to emigrate being keenly felt by some Palestinians. There had been in Jacksonville at least since the 1920's several families who traced their roots to the Christian community of Ramallah, a city about eight miles from Jerusalem. This group, a tight-knit clan tracing its ancestry back several hundred years to one pair of ancestors, had been a vigorous, affluent community prior to the 1948 war. For generations there had been a pattern of preferred cousin marriage and strong community bonds within this group. When the exodus of large numbers from Ramallah to the United States began during the 1950's and continuing to the present, they brought a particular variant of Middle Eastern culture with them. It is this source that accounts for the main immigrating additions to the Middle Eastern population of Jacksonville during Phase III.

Of the 12,000 immigrants estimated to have come from Ramallah to the United States, 1,500 reside in Jacksonville. These have mainly come in the period since 1950 and have developed ethnic organizations which reflect their own historical situation and interests.

Unlike the earlier migrants, these had received excellent public educations and entered the United States with recognized occupational and professional skills, or with economic assets as well as clan connections. In their homeland they had experienced the tensions related to the establishment of Israel, with its attendant religious difficulties and the imposition of minority status. They came by air rather than water.

Until recent years these migrants had participated in the larger Jackson-

ville Middle Eastern community, joining the ethnic formal organizations and attending established churches of the city. In the early 1970's, however, an Orthodox priest of their number came to Jacksonville to establish an Orthodox Church using the Syrian ritual, typical of the denomination in its Ramallah setting. This church has been completed and now serves as a focus for the family and clan celebrations as well as the religious services of the Ramallah subgroup. While family ties and clan bonds for all Middle Easterners are strong, the Ramallah group carries the obligations even further than the others. There is an expressed preference that their young people find mates within the Ramallah group. This group is also building a new social club facility for their own social needs, withdrawing to that extent from involvement with the larger Middle Eastern community.

Clearly, the migrants from Ramallah are committed to a greater degree of separatism than the other Middle Easterners, though in the economic sphere they have been remarkably successful. Because of its particular history this group is also more concerned with events in the old country than the other Middle Easterners have been.

Assimilation and Cultural Pluralism

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a gradual shift of emphasis, both in social theory and in public policy, away from the assimilationist model of dominant-minority patterns toward the pluralistic pattern. Early in the century there was a firm ideology of the "melting pot" as a working reality, illustrated by the cyclical models (Park) asserting that culture contact would in time result in a blending of cultures to form a new hybrid. Though some voices (Kallen, Addams) were raised to extol the richness of heritage present in this heterogeneous nation, the major emphasis until after the Second World War had been on assimilation as desirable and inevitable.

After the War scholarly works began to question the assimilation assumptions (Glazer and Moynihan, Kennedy). In 1964 a new model for analyzing the assimilation process was set forth (Gordon) subdividing the overall process into seven processes or variables and asserting that the subprocesses can proceed at different rates. Of these subprocesses--acculturation, structural assimilation into formal organizations and primary groups, intermarriage, absence of prejudice, absence of discrimination, identificational assimilation and civic assimilation--the last two are of relevance to this paper. Identificational assimilation refers to the process whereby minority members take on the patriotic sentiments and loyalty patterns of the dominant group. Civic assimilation refers to the minority members' access to the avenues of political power in the society.

The black power movement of the 1960's focused attention on the dilemma identificational and civic assimilation subprocesses pose for minority groups. If the patriotic identification with the dominant group is sufficiently strong, the interests of the subgroup may well be subordinated to the interests of more powerful elements in the larger whole. If, on the other hand, members of a minority express loyalty for their original country or subgroup, or even if they are unjustly suspected of this, over and above loyalty to their adoptive country, there can be problems of harassment having severe consequences. One need only recall the Japanese relocation centers during the Second World War to see the point.

Further, if access to civic, or political, power is channeled through election or appointment via acceptance by dominant group members, it does in fact reflect the assimilation process. If, on the other hand, civic power is acquired mainly through separatist organizations, block voting, social protest, or the like, it reflects pluralistic, and occasionally antagonistic, leanings.

This tactic can be very effective in promoting ethnic group interests but it often impedes assimilation.

To relate these variables to the subgroups of the Middle Eastern community of Jacksonville leads to some interesting speculations concerning the conditions under which minority groups may express assimilationist versus pluralistic tendencies via political opinion and behavior.

The migrants of Phases I and II came in search of economic opportunity as well as political and religious freedom from the despotic Turks who had ruled their homeland for hundreds of years. They felt loyalty to clan and to their respective religious communities but little loyalty to their nation of birth, per se. There are now many second and third generation members in this segment of the community. These have taken patriotism as well as military duty to the United States for granted and feel little sentiment, other than curiosity tinged with pride for the old country. The relatives who reside in the original locale seem remote.

The migrants of Phase III are more recent. They feel displaced from a homeland which, prior to the establishment of Israel, they had no interest in leaving. These feel that Israel is a creature of English and American colonialism and harbor resentment on behalf of Palestinian refugees and other Arabs whose land has gradually been preempted, as well as their own kin in Ramallah.

Cultural Pluralism, Assimilation and Political Attitudes, Behavior and Activism

On the basis of field work referred to above the present section sets forth several observations related to political attitudes, behavior and tendencies toward activism and their relationship to the assimilation process.

While general remarks are drawn from extensive contact over a long period of time, the more specific examples are drawn from data acquired through a questionnaire distributed to and returned by eighty-eight respondents in the summer of 1977.

In general it is clear that there are many evidences that the aspect of assimilation Gordon designates as acculturation, or behavioral assimilation, has proceeded to a pronounced degree among the Middle Eastern community in Jacksonville. In fact, the immigrants and their offspring from Phases I and II had, in many ways, severed political bonds with the homeland prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. Of the eighty-eight respondents to the questionnaires, 87 were citizens, either through naturalization (28.2%) or by birth (70.6%). Though some marital assimilation had occurred (31.9% of those married had married out of the group), the majority (68.1%) had taken spouses within the ethnic community. In terms of accepting and acting on the American value pattern which stresses education and upward mobility with respect to income, the evidence is again clear. While 34.5% of the respondents had educational attainment of highschool or less, 43.7% had had some college training, and 21.8% held graduate degrees. The group is heavily skewed toward high family income, with 18.8% earning $10,000 a year, 37.7% earning between $11,000 and $20,000, and 43.5% earning over $21,000.

Of particular significance to the points to be developed in the remainder of this paper is the question of country of origin and generation of the respondents, for it is along these two independent variables that differentiation of political attitudes and behavior related to cultural pluralism will be developed.

Of the eighty-eight respondents the following country of origin, either

for the person himself or for his ancestors, were reported: Syria 42%; Lebanon 21.6%; Iraq, or mixed Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, 13.6%; Palestine 22.7%. In terms of generational differences, the first or immigrant generation accounts for 25%; the second, or native of foreign-born parents, accounts for 56.8%; the third generation accounts for 18.2%.

With these background variables in mind the focus of the paper will shift to responses to questions which were designed to ascertain whether or not there is acceptance of political attitudes which reflect assimilation and identification with the larger, dominant society, as well as to probe areas where pluralistic loyalties might assert themselves and lead in other diresctions.

Within the questionnaire a number of items were devised to discover whether or not there is acceptance of American democratic political institutions. In addition to the citizenship question already reported, there were two other general items. One asked: "How important do you feel that it is for a citizen to exercise the right to vote?" The overwhelming majority, 84.7%, responded very important; an additional 12.9 % responded moderately important, and only 2.4% responded not at all important. Subsequent questions of voting performance in local, state and national elections verified the fact that this belief is put into practice in actual behavior. For example, in response to the question, "Do you vote in national elections?" 73.5% replied always, 15.7% replied sometimes and 10.8% replied never.

In an attempt to ascertain the degree of commitment to the ethnic community to the exclusion of other considerations, the question was asked: "Would you vote for a candidate of Middle Eastern background, regardless of his party or stand on the issues?" 75.3% replied no, while 24.7% replied yes.

Clearly there is a general pattern reflecting political assimilation

in the acceptance of the value of democratic election and a sense of more universalistic criteria for choosing candidates than ethnic loyalty.

Another group of questions was designed to probe the degree of sympathy and bonding felt for the Arab cause in the Middle East, which would reflect a pluralistic rather than an assimilationist leaning. There were two questions related to support for the Arab cause on the basis of organizational support. Two attitudinal questions dealt with willingness to participate in a Middle East war. These four questions have been analyzed to ascertain whether or not there are differences in the responses of people with differing countries of origin and from different generations. Since the findings on these four questions reveal some interesting variations they are reported here.

In answer to the question, "Do you support the Arab cause in the Middle East through affiliation with an organization?" 46.3% replied yes and 53.8% relied no. The overwhelming proportion of the yes responses came from Palestinians. Further, the pattern also reflected that the first generational group were the primary yes respondents. Since their migration was later, this probably reaffirms the foregoing.

The same pattern holds with the question, "Do you support the Arab cause in the Middle East through financial contributions?" 43.2% replied yes while 56.8% said no. The yes responses were mainly from the first generation and the Palestinian group.

In response to the statement, "I would not want a son of mine to fight in the armed forces of the United States if the U.S. were on the Israeli side of a Middle Eastern war," 65% agreed, 13.8% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 21.3% disagreed. With this question there was more unanymity of response between the generational groups and the groups of differing origins.

In response to the statement, "I would not want a son of mine to fight

in the armed forces of the United States if the U.S. were on the Arab side of a Middle Eastern War," 39.9% agreed, 20.5% neither agreed or disagreed, and 43.6% disagreed. Again the variation between the subgroups was not pronounced.

The data presented here are more suggestive than definitive and are certainly too fragmentary to prove anything. Yet they offer intriguing insights into the multifaceted and irregular patterns of the process of assimilation and its counterpart, cultural pluralism. The immigrants of Phase I and Phase II and their offspring, while far from "melting" in the American cauldron, have found the political developments in the Middle East problematical. While identifying with the adopted nation to an extraordinary extent in terms of patriotism and the duties of citizenship, they feel the state of Israel has been an imposition on their native area. Nonetheless, there has been some reluctance to give all-out support to the Arab cause either through affiliation or financial support. The newer migrants, in many ways more prepared for assimilation because of better educational holdings and prior training in English, for example, are more separatist in their orientation. Their homeland has been the locus of farreaching change and they feel more commitment. In some ways they have probably nudged the other members of the Middle Eastern community in the direction of more vocal activism on behalf of putting forth the Arab side to the Middle Eastern question. Organizational pressure can be an effective way to bring about changing governmental postures in foreign policy, and there is some evidence that there is now more awareness of the Arab view. Whether such activism will become a stumbling block to future assimilation remains to be seen.

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